

# Building Scene

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Marilyn Fitchett editor/953-2102



•••10

Thursday, April 30, 1992 O&E



## Builders sharpen focus on customer choice in houses

By Gerald Frawley  
staff writer

Even the most experienced of businessmen can't know everything about his customers' wants and needs.

Or to put it in another way: Give the people what they want and they'll beat a path to your door; try to give them what they don't want and they won't even know your name.

Builders have learned this lesson the hard way. In the past, they might have built homes they thought were good examples of everything a target audience could possibly want, but once the home was built he found few takers.

Builders commonly say their customers are more sophisticated today than in the past — the problem for them is finding out what these more sophisticated customers want.

Some work by trial and error and gut feelings. Some use projects that were successful in the past and modify them slightly using sale follow-up questionnaires and surveys.

Some builders use focus groups.

DEEN HYDE, marketing director with Pulte Home Corp. in Birmingham, said the building company has been using focus groups for years and they have gone a long way toward helping them design their homes.

Focus groups have been helpful to Pulte — one of the nation's largest home builders — in a number of ways, from evaluating advertising, gauging customer perception and evaluating products, Hyde said.

For the home builder, the most valuable use of focus groups is in helping them evaluate products.

"The problem with homes is people buy them before ever using them."

Because of that, problems that may be inherent in the design are not immediately evident to either the builder, the architect or the potential buyer.

For example, one of the houses Pulte sells in several of its developments, started out with a much smaller kitchen. "But what people told us is they needed more room. People gravitate to the kitchen."

Builders have long been told that kitchens are gathering points and that has become increasingly evident through the focus group.

"The breakfast nook is no longer sufficient."

KITCHENS TODAY are larger, have fireplaces, space for couches, island bars that people can eat around, television nooks, and built-in desks.

Focus groups also have been telling Pulte to return to the formal living room and dining room.

"They may never use them, but they want them."

Some younger families are still interested in the great room concept, she said, but many more want that room that is used infrequently and kept clean: "Someplace to take the insurance man or a salesman away from the mess."

Placement of master bed and bathroom — suites, upstairs versus downstairs laundry, two-story entry foyers, built-in shelves, art and plant areas — these and many other features are put into production because people demand them, she said.

"When people are home buying, they go to a lot of different sources," Hyde said. "A good builder respects these sources."

"We try to take those features in the expensive homes, the mansions, and — where possible — incorporate them into the less expensive homes," she said. "That gives the homes value to people."

Hyde also said that one of the more popular features these days is the back stairway — a feature that is driven by the plethora of television sitcom families.

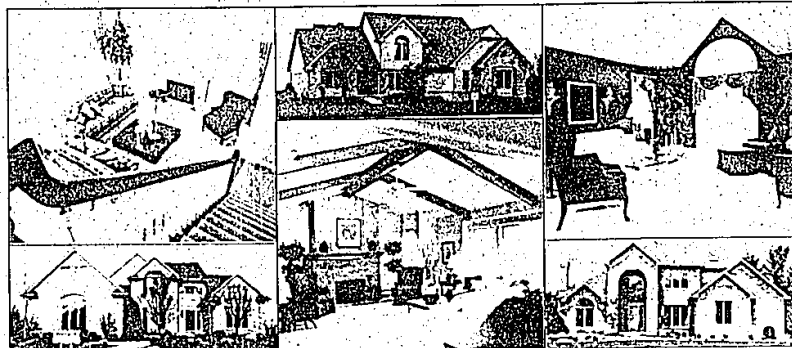
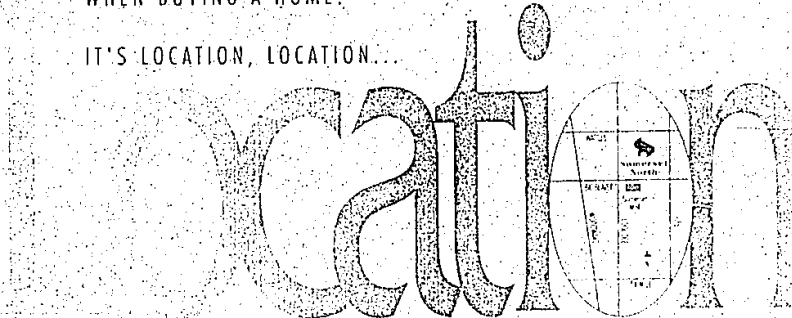
"On television sets, it's a practical matter — it's a way to get the actors on and off the set, but people really like it. Everyone uses the back staircase, and that leaves the front staircase nice for visitors."

STILL, MANY ideas will still be builder-driven, she said. Non-builders can't always see how a concept will look in real life, or how an art rendering translates into a real room.

An example might be the patio

YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY  
WHEN BUYING A HOME.

IT'S LOCATION, LOCATION...



If you've been house hunting for your family, you know how hard it is to find the perfect house in the perfect neighborhood. Don't compromise. You'll find what you're looking for at Somerset North.

The typical Somerset North buyer has 3.2 children, six bicycles and extremely good taste. Somerset North features beautiful, four-bedroom homes, on spacious lots with spectacular landscaping. Best of all, it has the highest quality schools for your children and some of the best shopping in the state for your whole family.

Stop by Somerset North today and discover the lifestyle you've been looking for. New models are open now.

Homes starting at \$260,000 • 1 1/2- and 2-story brick exterior homes • 2,800 to 3,800 sq. ft. • 4 bedrooms • 2 1/2 bathrooms • full basements • fireplace • ceramic tile • side entrance garage • city sidewalks • wooded sites

Homes offered by:  
Olympia Homes, Inc. (313) 362-0020  
American Home Corp. (313) 362-0479  
Sewell Homes, Inc. (313) 362-4788  
L.C. Homes, Inc. (313) 362-2272  
Entire Custom Homes Ltd. (313) 362-3070  
Divine Home Assoc. (313) 637-3155

Models open daily 1-6 pm (closed Thursdays)  
Over 100 lots available. Brokers welcome.



**Somerset  
North**

Coolidge Road  
just North of Big Beaver  
Troy, Michigan

Please turn to Page 2